

# Grafton Historic District Commission

## Design Guidelines



Town of Grafton, Massachusetts



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Grafton Historic District Commission's Guidelines produced by the members of the Grafton Historic District Commission.

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See <http://www.town.grafton.ma.us> for downloadable version of this document.

Applications for certificate can be acquired at the Town Hall, 30 Providence Road, Grafton, Massachusetts.

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## **Introduction**

There are over 200 local historic districts in the Commonwealth. Since the first historic district was established on Nantucket in 1955, many irreplaceable historic and cultural resources throughout Massachusetts have been protected by concerned property owners working with the volunteer members of the state's historic district commissions. The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C, was created to protect and preserve the historic resources of Massachusetts through a local review system that encourages and ensures compatible and appropriate improvement and development within historic districts.

The Grafton Historic District Commission (GHDC) is a group whose seven members appointed by the Board of Selectmen, meet monthly to help property owners in our historic districts make informed and successful decisions about exterior architectural and site changes to their properties. The GHDC is authorized by the Historic District Act (Chapter 47 of the town charter of the town of Grafton, Massachusetts) to review the appropriateness of all proposed exterior changes to buildings and structures within the historic districts which are visible from any public street, public way, public park or public body of water.

The members of the GHDC have written these guidelines to help you determine what your obligations are to both your property and your neighbors, and to help you understand how to use the members of the GHDC in an advisory role to improve the renovations process you are about to embark upon. As your neighbors and fellow owners of historic properties, we understand the challenges and rewards of owning an historic home or building, and are here to help you with questions and projects small and large.

## **Using these Guidelines**

If your work affects the exterior of your property, whether or not you need a building permit, you will need to review the work you are contemplating with the GHDC before beginning your project. The GHDC encourages historic district residents to contact the GHDC Chairman and arrange for an informal project review. An informal design review by the GHDC early on in the design process will ensure that your project will be a successful addition to the Historic District.

We invite you to use this document as a set of principles that can guide your work, and to see the members of the GHDC as professionals eager to collaborate with you in your efforts to preserve and enhance the valuable collective resource we all share in our historic district. Our goal is to be ready with helpful advice to the property owners within the district. We stand ready to assist you as you contemplate improvements to your property.

Property owners within our historic district should be aware that while the GHDC has a controlling interest in virtually all material aspects within the district, some elements of a owner's property – for example, the location of a driveway cut – are not principally the jurisdiction of the GHDC. In this instance the property owner would need to contact the director of the Department of Public Works. Other elements over which the GHDC does have jurisdiction – for example, the specifics of window and door placement in a new ell addition – also fall within the territory of the town's building inspector and, perhaps, also of the Conservation Commission if the footprint of the new structure falls within a wetland buffer zone. When in doubt about the scope of your project, a call to the GHDC Chairman early on can help you identify where to start.

## **Certificate Process**

If you own property in a historic district you will need to alert the GHDC of your intentions and submit an application prior to beginning your proposed project. The application forms may be found on the town's website at <http://www.town.grafton.ma.us>, or at the Grafton Town Hall. Please note that the certificate is not a building permit; you should also consult Grafton's building inspector prior to beginning any project.

Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness, Non-Applicability or Hardship must be filed with the GHDC, the Building Inspector and the Town Clerk. The date of the filing of an application is the date on which a copy of such application is received by the office of the Town Clerk. The GHDC has 14 days from the date of filing the certificate to determine whether the scope of the work involves any features that are subject to approval by the GHDC.

If the application requires review by the GHDC the proponent or his/her representative (i.e., a builder) may be asked to attend the commission meeting to discuss the project and answer any questions. If the scope of the project is significant, the GHDC may decide to hold a public hearing on the application. Public notice for a hearing is given at least 14 days in advance by posting in Town Hall, and in a newspaper of general circulation in Grafton.

## General Design Guidelines

When reviewing applications, the GHDC will be guided by standards set forth by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the *Treatment of Historic Properties*. In particular, the Standards state that:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property should be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property should be avoided.
3. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.
4. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property should be preserved.
5. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of a missing feature should be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.
6. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction that destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. New work should be differentiated from the old and should be compatible with the building's historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment. New additions and adjacent or related new construction which, if removed in the future, would impair the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment should be avoided.

## **Specific Design Guidelines**

### **Barns and Outbuildings**

**Existing Outbuildings** – Outbuildings, such as barns, garages, sheds, greenhouses, and gazebos, are subject to review and require approval if they are visible from a public way or place. It is strongly encouraged that Outbuildings which date to the District's period of significance should be retained and restored whenever possible with particular attention given to siding, roof, windows, and doors. Barns and Outbuildings significant to the District are subject to these guidelines.

**New Outbuildings** – The construction of a new outbuilding may be approved by the Commission provided it is designed and located in a manner that respects the style of other building(s) on its site, and respects the development pattern and siting of other historic outbuildings in the District. The Commission will consider the size, scale, design, and location of new outbuildings. A site plan should be provided to indicate the relationship to other buildings and structures on the lot and neighboring lots.

Proposals to add new Outbuildings should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

### **Chimneys and Masonry**

When repointing or rebuilding existing chimney(s), the owner should reuse the existing brick if possible, or find a closely matching replacement. Chimneys should be built to original height and any corbelling or other decorative features should be retained.

Repointing masonry should be appropriate in terms of the type, color and aggregate of the mortar to be used and the width and profile of the joint. Caps, if necessary should be made of appropriate material and size of the chimney. Wherever possible, original masonry and mortar should be retained. Original mortar should be duplicated in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.

Original masonry and mortar should be retained, wherever possible, without the application of any surface treatment. Old mortar should be duplicated in composition, color and texture. New mortar should reproduce original in joint profile and size, and should be applied using the same method as the original or existing mortar. Care must be taken in repointing to match the existing joint width and to over cutting of the joints. Joints should not be overfilled with mortar onto

the face of the brick or stone. Replacement brick or masonry units and mortar should be carefully matched in size and color to the originals, and follow traditional brick or masonry coursing if visible from a public way.

The property owner should not utilize sand blasting as a method of cleaning brick surfaces under any circumstance due to the resulting damage to the brick and environmental concerns.

If using brick as a cladding material in new construction particular attention should be paid to its detailing to avoid the appearance of a thin non-load bearing veneer.

The applicant may be required to provide a sample of proposed masonry materials.

Proposals to add new Chimneys or Masonry should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## **Demolition**

Demolition of any structure or portion thereof within the historic district requires the approval of the Historic District Commission, except when ordered by the Building Commissioner or other safety officer for reasons of public health and safety. Demolition is discouraged unless the structure is so deteriorated that rehabilitation is not practical or the structure is of no historic value to the district. In the former instance the Commission may require that a new structure replicating the original be built in the place of the demolished structure if its value is significant to the district.

In general renovation and/or replacement in kind is preferred to the demolition of all or a portion of a historic structure. Likewise, decorative architectural elements on the structure such as trim, brackets bays and porch columns shall not be removed without Commission approval. Preference will be given to replacement in kind.

If a historic structure's location interferes with the owner's plans for the property, relocation to an appropriate site is encouraged and is preferred to demolition.

## **Doors**

**Replacement of Original or Historically Significant Doors** - Original or historically significant doors should be retained whenever possible.. Replacement of original or historically significant doors, if necessary, should match the existing in material, size, design, and location. In addition to the door and its hardware, original or architecturally appropriate surround details, such as frames, fanlights,

sidelights, canopies, transoms and other decorative trim should be preserved or, if necessary, replaced in kind.

**Replacement of Non-Significant Doors** - If doors that are not original or architecturally significant are to be replaced, the replacement door and hardware should be appropriate to the style and use of the building in terms of material, design, size, and location, and be appropriate to the context of the building and the District as a whole. In addition, the Commission shall review and approve the scale, design, and material of the surround details and other decorative trim.

**Removal or Relocation of Existing Doors** - Removal or relocation of architecturally significant doors is discouraged. Relocation of non-significant doors maybe acceptable, provided they are not part of and do not contribute to an original or architecturally significant elevation (side) of the building.

**Addition of New Doors** - New doors and hardware may be added, provided they do not detract from an original or architecturally significant elevation.

Proposals to add new doors should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## **Fences**

Fences should be appropriate in scale and architectural style to the building, the site and its surroundings. Always be sure to check the Grafton Building Code before installing a fence. Fence location is important. Front yard fences should be adjacent to the sidewalk, with similar structures, if desired, extending back along the sidelines of the property. Fences should also align with neighbor fences if possible. When an application is filed to erect a fence, the application must include a plot plan of the property precisely showing the proposed location. Where privacy is an issue, the Historic District Commission suggests planting a living fence or hedge. Plantings are not subject to review by the Historic District Commission.

New fences may be added provided they are appropriate to the style and type of property in terms of material, design, size, and location. Privacy fences, such as solid board fences, are generally discouraged in the District, but may be allowed if minimally visible from a public way and do not obscure visibility of a significant structure from a public way. Stockade, chain link, light gauge metal and concrete block are not considered appropriate materials for fences within the Historic District and generally will not be approved by the commission.

## **Foundations**

**Existing Foundations** - In both residential and commercial buildings, the typical foundation material is unpainted brick, field stone or granite. In all cases, the material and design of original or architecturally significant foundations should be preserved whenever possible. Where repair or re-pointing is necessary, refer to the Masonry Guideline for mortar specifications.

**New Foundations** - Guidelines for New Construction set forth principles for use of materials, scale and massing. Often new foundations are substantially higher than historic foundations. This construction technique can alter the appearance of the entire building. Every effort should be made to design a low foundation and to screen a foundation that must be high due to building code conditions.

Proposals to add new Foundations should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## **Landscaping**

While the Historic District Commission does not have jurisdiction over landscape planting, when contemplating landscape changes property owners are encouraged to consult the wide variety of historic landscape resources that recommend choices suitable to the architectural style of their property.

## **Grading and Site Work**

When grading the site for either an addition or new construction the existing, natural contours and topography of the landscape should be preserved to the fullest extent possible. Proposed building heights are measured from the original grade prior to any site work. In designing the site, natural features such as large trees, watercourses, scenic or historic spots, habitats of rare or endangered species, and similar community assets should be preserved.

## **Gutters, Downspouts, and Drainage**

It is strongly recommended that Gutters constructed of wood, seamless painted aluminum or other metal should be of a scale, contour, and detail found to be compatible with the style and the historic character of the building. Unpainted, mill-finished aluminum is generally not appropriate for flashings, gutters and downspouts within the Historic District. Attachments should be concealed and visible hanging straps or brackets generally should not be used. Installation shall not involve the removal of any historic detailing such as cornice moldings or brackets. Gutters are considered inappropriate if constructed of short sections,

visible brackets, heavy connectors and prominent end caps and generally would not be approved by the commission.

## **Lighting**

The Grafton Historic District represents a variety of architectural periods where exterior lighting was either all but nonexistent or in the early stages of development.

It is desirable that original or later appropriate exterior lighting fixtures be retained and if possible repaired. Deteriorated or missing elements should be replaced with like materials whenever possible.

The replacement of existing exterior lighting fixtures with new should reflect a design and scale that is appropriate to the architectural style and period of the building. It is preferable that exterior lighting be kept at low levels to prevent glare or overspill of the light off the property. Over-illumination of building facades with flood lights is inappropriate to the historic district and generally would not be approved by the commission.

Property owners are strongly encouraged to consult the Grafton Zoning By-Law and review their request with the towns Zoning By-Law official before submitting an application to the commission.

Proposals to add exterior lighting for new additions or changes to a structure should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## **New Additions or Structures**

New construction, alterations, and additions to existing buildings within the Historic District are considered in this category. Proposals for new additions or structures will be dictated in part by the Town of Grafton Zoning By-Law which should be referenced carefully before proceeding with design. As in all cases of project design review, the Historic District Commission will consider and advise on the projects adherence to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## **Sheds, Gazebos, Play, Pools, or Other Structures**

Above ground pools, play structures, and the like are elements that require careful siting within the Historic District. Every effort should be made to site these

elements out of view from the public way to the maximum extent possible, or screen them with plantings when it is not possible. In the case of sheds, gazebos and other structures, selecting ones that compliment the house in both architectural style and materials is desirable. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for all of these items.

## **Paint**

Color is a primary element of a buildings style and should reflect a balanced consideration of authenticity and personal taste.

Property owners who wish to repaint the exterior of their building with its current color are not required to submit an application to the commission.

Historic District Commission approval is required for any change in color to the exterior of a building within the district. It is recommended for building owners to consider the age and architectural style of their building along with the color of adjacent buildings when selecting exterior colors. When submitting for a change in color please include the following with your application:

- Color name and manufacturer's number
- Sample painted on wood

The Historic District Commission is available to assist the property owner in the choice of a suitable color for the property.

Proposals to paint new additions or changes to a structure should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document

## **Porches, Stoops, Balconies, and Porticos**

It is recommended that existing porches, stoops, balconies, and porticos be retained and when necessary repaired "in kind" in order to maintain the historic appearance of the structure. Enclosing them with windows or walls or otherwise modifying their original appearance is not desirable and would generally not be approved by the commission.

Proposals to add new porches, stoops, balconies, and porticos should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document

## **Roofs**

The roof slope and configuration is an important element to the historic character of a building. Whenever possible the original slope and configuration should be maintained.

The preservation and repair of slate and cedar roofs is encouraged wherever possible. Where asphalt or fiberglass shingles are used it is imperative that they have a configuration and color that replicates historic materials. Rubber or membrane roofs should not be used in visible locations. Rooftop HVAC equipment and other mechanical elements should be placed out of view. Skylights should be placed out of view if possible. If possible any decorative patterns or textures of roofing material should be maintained.

Roof trim such as cornice trim, fascias and rake boards, decorative metal, finials, and weathervanes should be retained whenever possible.

Proposals to add new roofs for additions or changes to a structure should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document

## **Siding and Trim**

It is preferred that original siding and trim materials be retained whenever possible and deteriorated materials repaired or replaced with new material that closely as possible duplicates the original.

It is strongly recommended that siding and trim materials appropriate to the historic district, such as clapboard, brick, and wood be utilized for repair or replacement. Property owners are asked to consider preserving existing trim if possible and replacing it in kind when necessary.

The commission would highly encourage property owners to remove non-original materials and replace them with materials appropriate to the historic district.

Proposals for additions and new construction should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document. In addition, careful attention should be placed on neighboring historic buildings and the vicinity to determine the appropriate application and proportioning of siding and trim.

## **Signs**

Property owners and tenant businesses proposing a sign of any type should consult Section 4.4 of the Grafton Zoning By-Law which details the requirements that must be met in order to obtain a sign permit. In addition, it is strongly recommended that the applicant review their request with the Zoning By-Law official before submission.

The Historic District Commission also must approve signs to ensure that their basic design, color, size and scale integrate with the architectural character of the building and the streetscape. An applicant's creativity is appreciated, however they should note existing signs in the vicinity to retain visual harmony and enhance the visual integrity of the area.

Wooden signs are appropriate in the historic district. Synthetic signs, neon signs, the use of aggressive colors and or designs are viewed as inappropriate and generally not approved by the commission.

If proposed, sign lighting should reflect the style of the sign and historic character of the building. Lighting should illuminate the sign with as little spillage as possible. Colored lights are considered inappropriate for the historic district and generally not be approved by the commission.

Information required to submit with a sign application are:

- Scaled drawings for proposed sign ½" = 1 foot minimum, including thickness of sign, specifications for materials, colors, and typeface to be used.
- Actual sample of sign material and paint and finishes proposed for the sign
- Photographs or elevations of building showing exact location of proposed sign
- Details and specifications for proposed brackets/hangers, colors installation method, lighting fixtures, etc.
- Lighting plan (if necessary)

## **Shutters**

If appropriate for the building, existing shutters shall be retained and repaired whenever possible. Where replacement is necessary, new shutters shall match original or be of an appropriate type for the building. Shutters should reflect their original use and be sized such that they cover the entire window when closed. It preferable that when replacement or new shutters are hung they appear to be operable with slats pointing up when open and down when closed over the window. It is recommended that shutters be made of wood. Vinyl, aluminum, or metal shutters are not desirable and generally will not be approved by the

commission. The permanent removal of shutters from the building requires approval from the commission.

## **Stairways, Steps, and Railings**

Stairways, steps, and railings are important features of entryways and porches. It is recommended that whenever possible original features and detailing be retained or repaired in the same design and material. If existing features are not original, it is desirable that replacement design and materials be appropriate to the style of the building.

It is preferred that deteriorated or missing elements and decorative ornamentation be replaced with materials and elements to match original, or be similar to the original. Stonework may be repaired, replaced, or extended using the existing materials and all new work should be appropriate to the period and character of the building. Railing/baluster design and spacing should be historically appropriate and repair to existing railing/balusters should maintain the original proportions when possible.

Proposals for new stairways, steps, and railings should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document. (Note: If a new railing design is desired a scale drawing illustrating details of the new design must be provided)

## **Windows**

Windows are a key element in contributing to a building's appearance and establishing the scale and rhythm of the façade.

It is strongly recommended that original wood sashes be repaired in kind, whenever possible, particularly for those facing the public way. Retrofitting of original window sashes with weather stripping and/or insulated glass is encouraged. If necessary, replacement sashes and hardware within the original frames is preferred. If total replacement is required it is recommended that the owners maintain original window size, location, material, trim, and type of window.

The Historic District Commission is available to assist you in determining a suitable window type for your building

Proposals to add new windows for additions or changes to a structure should adhere to the intent of the General Design Guidelines outlined on page 6 of this document.

## Appendix

List of recommended Resources:

PreservationMass: A statewide organization with a website listing consultants in various historic conservation, preservation, and restoration specialties.

[www.preservationmass.org](http://www.preservationmass.org)

Historic Building Façades: The Manual for Maintenance and Rehabilitation (Preservation Press) New York Landmarks Conservancy, Author: William G. Foulks

Old House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture, 1600-1940. Author: Steven J. Phillips

Caring for Your Old House: A Guide for Owners and Residents  
Author: Judith L. Kitchen.

A Building History of Northern New England -  
Winner of the 2002 SPNEA/Historic New England Book Prize  
Author: James L. Garvin

Historic New England  
141 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA 02114  
[www.historicnewengland.org](http://www.historicnewengland.org)

Old House Journal Magazine  
Publisher: Home Buyer Publications/Active Interests Media  
4125 Lafayette Center  
Chantilly, VA 20151

Housekeeping for Historic Sites. Video  
VHS format. 60 minutes.  
Produced in collaboration with the National Park Service and the New York State Bureau of Historic sites, this instructional film describes proper cleaning methods for different types of objects commonly found in historic houses.

Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings  
Authors: Rudy J. Favretti and Joy Putman Favretti. Second edition, revised. AltaMira Press, CA 1991

For Every House A Garden: A Guide for Reproducing Period Gardens  
Authors: Rudy and Joy Favretti.

Tower Hill Botanic Garden and Library  
11 French Dive, Boylston, MA 01505  
[www.towerhillbg.org](http://www.towerhillbg.org)